

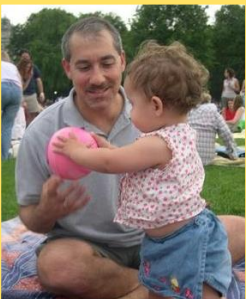


**Utah
Parent
Center**

Special needs,
extraordinary potential

Transition from Early Intervention to Special Education Preschool

What You Need to Know Before
Your Child's Third Birthday



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Thank you to our partners for making this handbook and the accompanying video possible:

- Baby Watch Early Intervention Program
- Utah Bureau of Child Development
- Early Intervention Interagency Coordinating Council
- Utah State Office of Education Special Education Services
- Granite School District Special Education Preschool Services
- Utah Parent Center staff and volunteers.

If your child is receiving services in an Early Intervention program, it is important for you to understand your role in helping your child have a smooth transition when he or she turns three years old. This handbook will explain how this transition process works and what you as a parent need to know.

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Families are Important

Families are the most important people in a child's life. Parenting is a big responsibility. Parents and family members make sure their children are safe and have good care. They watch to see that their children grow and develop as they should for their age. This is a big challenge.



It can be an even bigger challenge when parents know their child has a disability or if they think their child is not developing like other children the same age. It is hard to know what a child should be doing and what to expect. At times parents may feel alone and not know where to turn for help.

But parents do know their children better than anyone else does. Know that you are your child's best advocate and also the one who will be most affected as you share your child's joys and challenges.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

There is a federal law called the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) that provides services for children with disabilities. Part C of this law covers early intervention services for children from birth through age three. In Utah, the Baby Watch Early Intervention Program under the Utah Department of Health is the state agency that oversees all of the local programs.

A little later we will talk about Part B of the law which covers school services for children aged three and over and is referred to as special education. It is important for parents to understand the law and know how the process is designed to work. We will be telling you about a number of resources that can help you learn more about the law.

The process outlined in IDEA that is used for both your child's Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP) and Individualized Education Programs (IEP) is a very logical process. After your child is referred, he or she is evaluated. If your child is found eligible, then the IFSP or IEP is developed and services are determined. The team then decides upon placement or where the services should be delivered. The services are given, and then at least once per year, the team meets again to update the IFSP or IEP. This cycle continues until the child is no longer eligible.

An Important Note: Team Partners

The law provides a process where decisions about your child's services are made by a team. You, the parents, are required members of the team. Your participation is needed at every step in the process. Team members include administrators and other people providing services to your child. You will want to know the other team members and understand their roles. If you do not know, ask their names and what their roles and responsibilities are. As your child moves into special education preschool perhaps there is a special educator, a speech language therapist, a physical therapist or an audiologist. There are many possibilities of who could be on the team depending on your child's needs. Be positive as you go into the team meetings and remember that everyone has your child's best interest in mind and wants to support you and meet your child's needs. Everything the team does should be focused on your child's needs. If you don't understand a comment or something that is proposed, ask questions. You could say, "Can you give me an example of how this would work?" or "I'm not sure I understand. Could you explain this a little more?"



It is important for you, the person who knows your child best, to provide the team with information about your child. We'll provide information about some ways to help you prepare to share what you know in following sections.

Transition = Change



When we talk about transition, we are simply talking about change from one program to another. Children may receive services through Baby Watch Early Intervention as needed from birth up until their third birthday. When children turn three years old, they may be eligible to receive services from special education preschool programs provided by the school district. In order to have a smooth transition to the new program, planning and preparation must start well before the child's third birthday. Now let's talk more about how the change or transition will work.

Transition can be an exciting time! It marks growth and opportunities.

However, parents may have questions about what will happen during transition. What are some of the concerns and questions that you have? You might want to take a minute to write them down so that you remember to ask. Your child's Early Intervention Service Coordinator and other providers are a great resource and will be glad to answer any questions you may have.

Differences Between Early Intervention and Special Education Preschool Programs

It is helpful to understand some of the similarities and differences between early intervention programs and special education preschool programs.

In Utah, children are served in local early intervention programs under the State's Baby Watch Early Intervention Program until they turn three years old. The names of the local programs vary and each is an important source of services and supports to help families in the community enhance their children's learning and development. At age three, if eligible, the child may enter a special education preschool, provided by the local school district. Special education may continue throughout the school years if the child continues to be eligible.

Early Intervention Services may be at no cost to the family, funded by Medicaid or CHIP, or a family may be assessed a fee, based on the family's ability to pay. When eligible children move into special education preschool, they receive a free appropriate public education or "FAPE" at no cost to the parents.

In early intervention, families have an Individualized Family Service Plan or IFSP that documents the services that will be provided. In special education preschool, an Individualized Education Program, or IEP, replaces the IFSP.

Early intervention is family-centered, while special education preschool is child-centered. This means that the IFSP is based on the needs the family has to help them meet their child's needs. When children move into special education preschool, the program is focused more directly on the child's needs. Both programs are designed to meet the needs of children in a very individualized way.

In early intervention, a child is primarily served in the natural environment. A natural environment is a setting that is natural or typical for a child at that age, and can include the home or community settings such as day care or Early Head Start. Preschool children are typically served in the school setting.

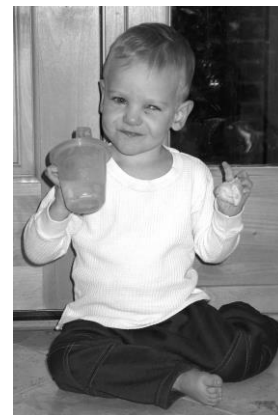
A local Service Coordinator coordinates early intervention services. In special education preschool, the school district personnel provide the services. Instead of working with a service coordinator, you will work with the IEP team.



Transition to Special Education Preschool

Children in early intervention programs who are eligible must experience a smooth and effective transition to special education preschool programs or other community resources. Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) provides special education preschool programs under local school districts for eligible children ages three to five.

If your child is eligible and will continue on to a special education preschool program, an Individualized Education Program, or IEP, must be in effect by the child's third birthday. Since special education preschool is provided by your local school district, it will require you and your early intervention service coordinator to participate in a transition planning conference with the school district to discuss options for special education preschool and community programs and to plan for establishing eligibility for special education preschool. As mentioned, you, the parent, are an important participant in this planning process.



Let's look at how the transition process works.

It is a step-by-step process outlined in the IDEA law.

As early as your child's first individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) meeting or your child's second birthday, your service coordinator along with you and other members of your IFSP team will begin to **discuss potential transition options**. You will **work together to begin your child's plan**. The transition steps and services will be **written on the transition plan** page of your child's IFSP.

During IFSP meetings and throughout your child's time in Early Intervention, you will **talk about and work on developmentally appropriate skills that will help your child progress** as he or she moves from early intervention to other programs. Important skills for a child could include: being independent and getting his or her needs met, engaging in activities, and interacting socially with peers and adults.

When your child is 27 months old, **your child's name and contact information is sent to the local school district for the purpose of planning** the number of students who may be eligible for special education preschool services. You may decline to give permission to have information sent to the school district.

A transition conference is a required meeting that will be arranged by your service coordinator with you and the local education agency (LEA) or district special education preschool coordinator and other appropriate team members who have been or will be serving your child.

At least 90 days before your child's third birthday a transition conference will be held to discuss your child's needs, the different options for services, and possible eligibility for special education preschool services. If your child has a visual impairment, hearing impairment, or a particular medical condition that requires planning for the special education preschool to meet their specific needs, the transition conference is held 120 days or more before the third birthday.

In order to schedule your transition conference, your early intervention program will need you **to sign consent to share information about your child** with the special education preschool agency representative.

IDEA Process

Who should attend the transition conference? The Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) is the federal law that outlines the transition process from early intervention to special education preschool. The three people required to attend the IEP meeting are parents, the early intervention Service Coordinator and the Special education preschool Coordinator or local education agency representative (LEA). Others who could attend would be members of the IFSP team, staff from the special education preschool program, private providers from programs the parents are interested in, representatives from community programs such as Head Start, or anyone else you would like to invite, including grandparents or friends who know your child well. Parents can also bring someone to support or coach them in their role.

What will happen at the transition conference? The transition conference will help to identify preschool options and other community programs that your child might transition to and your child's potential eligibility for services. The team will decide whether to make a referral to special education preschool to determine if your child is eligible.



Parents have the right to decide if they want their children to participate in a special education preschool program. If you decide to wait, you can ask for an evaluation at a later time or you may choose to opt-out of receiving special education preschool services. You will need to express this directly at the transition conference.

Eligibility for Special Education Preschool Services

Eligibility for special education preschool services is not the same as early intervention eligibility. Some children who receive early intervention services are not eligible for special education preschool services. An evaluation by the school district will determine:

- If your child qualifies as a student with a disability,
- Your child's present level of academic achievement and functional performance,
- If your child's disability has an adverse effect on your child's ability to participate in and benefit from age-appropriate activities, and
- If your child needs special education and related services.

During your child's evaluation, **information will be gathered about your child's functional performance and development.**

Remember that **you are an expert on your child**, and you have important information to share during the evaluation process that no one else has. You may have medical records or results from private evaluations. You know what your child can do and cannot do and how your child responds

in different situations. You know what your child likes. Your hopes and dreams for your child are important. The team will consider the information you share in determining his or her eligibility.

As a member of the team, you help to decide what assessments are needed to determine eligibility and plan for your child's education. Personnel from the special education preschool may be involved in conducting the evaluation.

You must receive prior written notice and give consent. The prior written notice tells you the actions that the special education preschool is proposing including which areas will be assessed and which tests will be used. Your signature on the consent form gives your permission for the evaluation to begin. The school district must have your written consent in order to proceed.

Be Sure to Ask Questions

Before you consent to the evaluation, you should **feel free to ask any questions** that you have. You may wish to ask such questions as:

- How will the information gathered by the early intervention program be used?
- What tests or evaluation methods will be used and why?
- Are the tests valid for children with my child's disability?
- What steps will be taken to make the tests culturally appropriate?
- Will the test be in my child's native language?
- What information will I, as a parent, be contributing?
- Who will be doing the assessment?
- How will the testers help my child to feel comfortable with the testing?

Remember:

It is always OK to ask questions at any point during the process. You can take notes about the answers you receive to help you remember what was discussed. Being an informed parent helps you to contribute in a meaningful way.

The testing is generally conducted at the special education preschool program. You may be asked to fill out a questionnaire or to be interviewed regarding such things as your child's birth and medical history, how the child has progressed, what your child can do and can't do and other information about your home and family environment.

After the evaluation is complete, **a report will be written, and the team, which includes the parents, will determine whether or not your child qualifies for special education preschool services.** You should **receive a copy of the report and an explanation.** Again, be sure to ask any questions you have. If you disagree with the results you may request an independent evaluation at the school district's expense. Someone outside of the school district would do the independent evaluation.

For more information about an independent evaluation or any of your other rights, you may contact the Utah Parent Center for an individual free consultation by calling 800-468-1160.

A child receiving early intervention services may be eligible with the category of 'developmental delay'. For a child to be eligible to receive special education preschool services, they may continue with the category of 'developmental delay' or under one of the federal/state categories as follows:

- Autism
- Deafblindness
- Emotional Disturbance
- Hearing Impairment/Deafness
- Intellectual Disability
- Multiple Disabilities
- Orthopedic Impairment
- Other Health Impairment (such as asthma, attention deficit disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, diabetes, epilepsy, a heart condition, hemophilia, lead poisoning, leukemia, nephritis, rheumatic fever, sickle cell anemia, Tourette syndrome, and some kinds of acquired brain injuries, etc.)
- Specific Learning Disability
- Speech/Language Impairment
- Traumatic Brain Injury
- Visual Impairment (including Blindness)
- Developmental Delay (ages 3-7 only in Utah)

These categories are not “labels” but provide general descriptions of your child’s needs and are primarily used for reporting. Identifying a category is required to receive special education services but should not in any way determine the services that are provided to meet a child’s individualized needs.

Your Child’s IEP

Once your child is evaluated and has been determined eligible for special education preschool services, it is time to **write an IEP or Individualized Education Program**. The IEP meeting must be conducted and the IEP developed **before your child’s third birthday**.

The IEP determines the services your child will receive. You will want to understand the IEP process and your rights and responsibilities as a member of the IEP team. **You are an important member of the IEP team**, and your input is needed during the planning process. The team should consider your hopes, dreams, and concerns for your child as you discuss the different services that are available. Your legal rights should also be explained to you.

Preparing for the IEP Meeting

Preparing for the IEP meeting can help you to feel confident about the information you will share. Be sure to **bring information about your child**. You can **make notes for yourself** or, even better, you could bring material that you have compiled into a handout to share with the team. You will want to consider information from evaluations your child has had. Be sure to bring copies of your child's IFSP to help you show what outcomes your child has been working on and what your child can and cannot do. Some things you might want to share would include:

- Your child's history.
- Information on your child's progress.
- What your child can do and cannot do in all areas of your child's development.
- Information on how your child learns best and what is motivating to your child.
- Information on any medical needs that will affect your child's education or that needs to be considered while at school.
- What services and supports your child needs in order to learn.
- Your priority for your child's learning.

The Utah Parent Center has several resources that might be useful to help you to get started compiling information about your child. These are found on the Center's website and in the Parents as Partners in the IEP Process Handbook:

- "Child Profile" Worksheet
- "Student Profile" Worksheet
- Sample Profile
- Worksheet for Organizing Your Concerns about School-Related Problems
- IEP Meeting Planner

The team will use information from your child's evaluation and information that you and other team members share to decide what the child's present levels of academic achievement and functional performance are. Knowing your child's current levels is important in helping the team to write appropriate goals. Writing appropriate goals helps the team decide what services your child needs to work on the goals. A wonderful thing about the IEP is that it is truly individualized to your child and needs to be as unique as your child is.

What is Special Education?

Special education is specially designed instruction to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability, including instruction in the classroom, home, hospital or institution or in other settings and instruction in physical education.

The **purpose of special education is to provide a free appropriate public education** or FAPE. FAPE is provided beginning no later than your child's third birthday. FAPE means that special education

and related services are provided at no cost to the parents. The services must be provided as outlined in the IEP.

All children eligible for special education are **served under one of 13 classifications**. Some children in preschool may continue to be served under the general classification of “developmental delay,” which was the classification used in early intervention. When appropriate, some preschool children are served in more specific classifications. The classification is based on specific requirements, but it does not determine what services are provided to your child.

It is helpful to remember that everything that is done should be **based on the child’s needs**. Keeping this in mind should help the team members’ work together to come to agreement about the services that are needed.

Developing the IEP

Let’s talk about how the IEP is developed. It is very similar to how your IFSP under early intervention was developed.

There are specific requirements about the IEP team members who must participate in the IEP meeting. The required team members include:

- Parents.
- Special Education Teacher(s).
- General Education Teacher(s).
- A principal or other representative of the school district called the local education agency (LEA) representative. This is a person who has the authority to commit resources for serving your child.
- An individual who can interpret evaluation results if the evaluation is being discussed.

Other who may attend an IEP include:

- The student, if appropriate.
- Related services providers, such as speech therapists, physical therapists, or occupational therapists, and so on.
- Others who have knowledge or expertise about the child. This could include relatives, people who have served the child, and anyone the parent chooses to invite such as a person who is there to support or coach the parent. It can be very helpful to let the team know that you are inviting such a person, but it is not required.



What is an IEP?

The IEP is a **written Individualized Education Program** that is developed, reviewed, and revised in a team meeting. The IEP has 8 required components and can include additional information as appropriate. The required components of an IEP are:

1. The present levels of academic achievement and functional performance (PLAAFP) tells how your child is functioning. For special education preschool children, this statement describes how the child's disability affects progress in appropriate activities and in pre-academics, communication, social emotional skills, functional skills, and behavior. This description of how your child is currently functioning is the basis upon which the IEP is built.
2. **Measurable annual goals** are written statements that describe what the child should accomplish in the next year. These goals may be communication goals, or pre-academic goals such as pre-reading or numeracy skills, or they can be functional goals, such as learning how to walk, or how to put on a coat.
3. Some special education preschool students **may participate in district wide assessments**. For those students, the team should consider whether the child needs accommodations or modifications for participating in the assessments.
4. Next is a **written statement** of how the student's progress toward meeting the annual goals will be measured and **when the parents will receive reports** on the progress the child is making toward meeting the annual goals. This information is designed to help everyone know if the IEP is working or if changes need to be made. It is important for parents to know how the child is progressing throughout the year.
5. Next is a **written statement of the related services and service coordination and other supports and services** that are needed for the child to advance towards the annual goals. Related services are part of the IEP and include services required to assist the child to benefit from special education. Related services might include one or more of the following based on your child's needs:
 - Speech language pathology and audiology
 - Transportation
 - Interpreting services
 - Psychological services
 - Physical and occupational therapy
 - Recreation, including therapeutic recreation
 - Early identification and assessment of disabilities in students
 - Counseling services including rehabilitation counseling
 - Orientation and mobility services
 - Medical services for diagnostic or evaluation purposes
 - Health services and school nurse services
 - Social work services in schools
 - Parent counseling and training

This list includes related services that a child might need, depending on the child's disability. For example, a child who has fine motor problems might need occupational

therapy to teach him how to hold his spoon and feed himself. Or a child who has a delay in language might need the services of a speech-language provider.

6. The **least restrictive environment (LRE) statement must address the extent to which the child will not participate with non-disabled children** in regular classes or activities.
7. The IEP must address **any accommodations that are necessary for the child** to participate in the special education preschool program. Some accommodations for young children might include seating arrangements, picture schedules, communication boards or systems, walkers, wheelchairs, or special diets.
8. The last required component of the IEP is a **written statement of the frequency and duration of services**. This statement includes the date services begin, and their frequency, location and duration. For example this could be a statement of when physical therapy would start and the frequency, location, and duration of the physical therapy services.

There are several other things that must be considered in case a child needs them. These considerations include:

- Assistive Technology.
- Behavior Needs.
- Braille, for children who are blind or visually impaired including pre-braille for preschool aged children.
- The communication needs of the student, including the needs of children who are deaf or hearing impaired.
- If the child has limited English proficiency, and
- A health care plan. A child with medical needs may have a separate health care plan or it may be included as part of the IEP.



A lot has been accomplished when we get to this point in the IEP. We have agreed on the child's needs and services, and it is time to decide on the placement. Placement means the kind of setting in which the child will receive services. Remember that to the maximum extent appropriate, children are educated with children who are not disabled. For children in early intervention, this means in the natural environment. In special education preschool, there are various settings that might be considered depending on the child's needs including:

- Regular classes,
- Special classes,
- Special schools,
- Home instruction, and
- Instruction in hospitals and institutions.

Once the IEP is completed, everyone will sign it. The parent is asked to sign it as documentation of participation. Your signature is not an indication of agreement with the IEP. The parent must be

provided with a copy of the IEP. We recommend that parents keep this copy in their important records about the child.

Parents will want to keep track of how their child is progressing on the IEP goals. If things are not working as planned or for any other reason the parent can ask to discuss concerns with the team or individual members of the team, and if needed, to make adjustments to the IEP. And remember, the IEP must be revised at least once every year in a new IEP team meeting.

Procedural Safeguards

Parents should **receive a booklet outlining their procedural safeguards**, or the rights that the IDEA guarantees to children with disabilities and their families. You may also ask your case manager for a copy. Your procedural safeguards outline when you should receive written prior notice about actions that are proposed and when you must give written consent. They also outline remedies that the law provides if you disagree with the team or if the school does not comply with the law. Your rights should be discussed, and you should ask the special education preschool personnel any questions that you have.

If you have concerns about how things are going with the IEP now that your child is in preschool, you have many avenues for getting help and resolving problems. Usually the first place you want to go is to the team members who are serving your child. Most problems can be resolved by talking with the special education preschool personnel. If you still have concerns, it is usually best to go up the chain of command in your school. For example, you could go to the principal. If you need more help, then you could speak to the special education administrators in your school district. If that does not work, you may want to contact the Utah State Office of Education Special Education Services Section.

Remember:

The Utah Parent Center has Parent Consultants who can provide information and suggestions on how you might want to resolve problems. You can call for a free individual consultation at any time in the process. They may also refer you to other resources for support, mediation or legal help, if necessary.

The law provides several formal dispute resolution options, which are outlined in your procedural safeguards. These options include:

- Mediation
- Filing a State complaint
- Asking for a due process hearing, and
- Civil action in the court system.

If you are considering one of these options, you would definitely want to obtain some expert advice. Again you may contact the Utah Parent, the Utah State Office of Education, Special Education Services Section or the Disability Law Center for assistance.

A Great Experience Awaits You!

You have many new adventures ahead with your child, and by being an informed parent, you can help your child to have a great experience as you transition from early intervention into the school system and work to achieve wonderful things in life. We hope you will take the opportunity to use the free services and learn more about the Utah Parent Center by visiting our website at www.utahparentcenter.org, attending one of our workshops, or calling one of our Parent Consultants.



For More Information...

This is a brief introduction to the IEP process. For more detailed information, you may want to:

- View the Utah Parent Center's (UPC or Center) online video training modules on the UPC's website under the training tab at www.utahparentcenter.org (free DVD copies also available from the UPC),
- Attend one of the Center's IEP workshops (see the event calendar on the website),
- Read the UPC's IEP handbook, *Parents as Partners in the IEP Process*, or review one of the many information sheets providing related content which are available on the Center's website: www.utahparentcenter.org
- Review the various information sheets about the IEP process on the UPC website such as:
 - Special Education – Basic Information for Parents
 - An Overview of the Special Education Process
 - IEP Team Building
 - IEP Tips for Parents*See website for other related content.*

Contact one of the Parent Consultants at the Utah Parent Center who are available to answer your questions through free individual consultations (all are parents of children with disabilities).

Remember that your child's IEP team leader and other team members are excellent sources for information about how the IEP can be individualized for your child.

Additional Resources

- **Baby Watch Early Intervention**
Phone: 801.584.8226
Toll Free in Utah: 1.800.961.4226
Website: www.utahbabywatch.org
- **Utah State Office of Education, Special Education Services Section, Preschool**
Phone: 801.538.7587
Website: <http://www.schools.utah.gov/sars/>
- **Disability Law Center**
Phone: 801.363.1347
Toll Free in Utah: 1.800.662.9080
Website: www.disabilitylawcenter.org
- **NICHCY: National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities**
Website: <http://nichcy.org/babies>
- **Zero to Three: National Center for Infants, Toddlers, and Families**
Website: www.zerotothree.org
- **Love and Logic**
Website: www.loveandlogic.com

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